207

REFORM OF EDUCATION

PERIYAR E. V. RAMASAMI

Reform of Education

Thanthai Periyar

(Translated by A S VENU)

@Nimirvom

E Book by DVK on Aug 2021

Periyar writings and Speeches translated by A S VENU and this Speech delivered by Thanthai Periyar on 24-4-1927, at the Teachers' Conference held at Polur. North Arcot District

Dravidar Viduthalai Kazhagam

திராவிடர் விடுதலைக் கழகம்

REFORM OF EDUCATION

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

You have accorded me a rousing reception and presented me an address of welcome on a grand scale. I reluctantly accepted it. I am at a loss to know as to how far I really deserve so much honour. You are all teachers who impast education. Many of you are renowned in the field of education. So far as I am concerned, I have not been educated to any extent in the school worth mentioning and so I feel that I do not deserve the honour you havə shown towards me. In fact, I could not refuse to participate in this function on account of the love and affection you all have towards me. However I consented. Throughout my life, I was sent to school to learn only for a period of two years. Those two years wero, when I was aged between 8 and 11. Even in those two years, the time I devoted for studying would not be much. Most of my school days were spent in receiving punishments from the teachers.

When my parents came to know of this, they decided that I was not fit for learning. So, they ¡ asked me to look after the business when I was 11 years old. What all I learnt in: that period of two years was merely to put my signature. So I think that I am in no way competent to talk about the educational system and your problems. However I shall try to say a few words from my experience.

Nowadays, the teachers deem their profession as a noble profession. Yet they are not in a posi. tion to discharge their duties They are not able to realise their responsibilities under the existing system As such the teachers profession also is reduced to be a profession to eke out a mere living. The teachers conduct conferences and pass resolutions demanding more facilities and increase in their salaries. These conferences do not serve the purpose of

setting ariyht their role to the people at large. These conferences are not held to concert measures to reform our edcational system towards the progress of the nation.

At the outset it must be clearly understood that the education you have all gained and the education you teachers impart to the students is mainly to keep the wolf from the door. That is my opinion. Our education is not for enriching the knowledge and wisdom of the people. It does not serve the purpose of creating a disciplined orderly society. I hope you will all agree with me when I say that the education imparted from the primary stage to the higher level is merely a contrivance to safeguard the tyrannic rulers. Our education is for the prolongation of slavery. Our education gives no scope for developing self-respect. It merely produces fresh hands to serve the government. In short our education is like a machine producing mostly traitors.

Generally speaking, if we are to use the term primary teachers, I think we could rightly use it for our womenfolk, because it is the women who educate the children up to the age of 6 or 7. It is the mothers who tutor the children as teachers. I saw this in foreign countries also.

So, you become teachers to children only after their being tutored by mothers. The way in which the mothers and teachers educate the children is of great significance. The children become responsible citizens and do good to the nation in proportion to the efforts taken by parents and teachers. So the people depend on teachers and the teachers depend on the people. But, the women in our country, who are the primary teacbors are treated as mere machines to produce children. How could they educate children, when they remain uneducated? Unless we provide education to women, they will not be able to educate children. So this is the sorry state of affairs with our primary teachers-the women.

Secondly, considering you primary teachers, you have got to convene a conference for your existence itself! Under these circumstances bow are we to expect the children tutored by you to attain a good standard.

Education is pot for mere earning to live! If we sincerely mean that education is for gaining know ledge, it must be for attaining self-respect and freedom. It must make the people live with love towards all and have no hatred towards any one. It must create a sense of unity. No one should think of harming or insulting others. Everyone must be made to feel for others and lead a disciplined and honest life.

Understanding the value of education Thiru valluvar had long ago stated that one who declines to suit himself to the world, cannot be considered to be educated at all, even if he be distinguised in the field of education (உலகத்தோடு ஒட்ட ஒழுகல் பல கற்றும் கல்லார் அறிவிலாதார்). In short, he says in his couplet curtly that such people are illterates. In another couplet Thiruvalluvar defines that an educated person in one who aspires the entire world to enjoy all things he enjoys. In another couplet he says, that he who does not compare with others and take the good for his own development is merely one amongst the dead.

Now, I would like to ask you as to what you do to evaluate our education on these lines. What are we going to gain by merely tutoring children, that a dog has four legs-a cat has a tail-the blind have no eyes-Do not steal-do not beat and so on. All these things the children could learn by themselves, without the help of a teacher. They know that if one beats a person, he would weep and abuse. They know that if one steals he would be caught and beaten black and blue. They know which animal has four legs and a tail, the moment they see the animal. So, I am of the opinion that there is no need to spend so much money and

precious time to teach all these things. It is not also necessary to make such a gullible propaganda about primary education:

To start with, you must impart to children what self-respect is. You must first teach the children what manly actions are. You must teach things to make them safeguard their dignity, honour and prestige. Teach them to live with equality. Teach them to be kind towards all. • They must be taught about universal brotherhood. They must be taught to be patriotic. I would like to ask you now whether you are all able to do so. It is for you to think over the matter yourselves. Not only your selves but also the highly educated degree holders aod doctorates are seen to address the suppliers in the hotels as “Samy”. Beckoning the suppliers who are collecting the used plates, cups and saucers, the so called highly educated people address "Samy, Please get me a cup of coffee". In order to go to heaven these so called educated people give money to others and prostrate before them. They betray the nation and the people with the selfish motive of attaining salvation. Are the degrees gained by them indicative of their being highly educated? How are we to consider the degree-holders as educated people ?

Even as the washermen, barbers, carpenters, blacksmiths, and cobblers learn their trade and attain proficiency, these degree-holders learn the concerned subjects. Even as a washerman is ignorant of history, the B.A. degree-holders know not the washing techniques. Even as a barber does not know geography, M.A. degree-holders know not the art of hair-cutting. Even as a cobbler does not know anything about grammar, literature and Vedas, ... the educated pandits do not know to make or mend the shoes. So, we cannot say that the degree holders alone are wiser, superior and more useful to the society than those, who are barbers, cobblers and so on. All these things are merely trades and they are not at all significant of real education or know ledge or wisdom. Despite a high degree of education,

one can be a fool. He can be selfish. He can also bc without self-respect. Even without this education one can be intelligent, unselfish and helpful to society. So from all these we can understand that this is not real education. I am of the strong opinion that our education system is the root cause for our degrada tion. Most of the evils prevalent are due to our faulty educational system. In the olden days, educa. tion was imparted through pial schools. In what way is our modern educational system better. Instead of writing on dry palm leaves and sand, we are wasting our money for papers, books, ink, box, pencil, pen and rubber. By this our monoy is exploited by the Britishers(1927). Tell me if there is anything beneficial to us. Can we say without hesitation that those with modern education are having good traits than those of the uneducated people of the past? In what respect are our educated people better than those uneducated people in the past. Could it be declared that our educated people are trustworthy, honest, kind and friendly

In the olden days if one fails to repay the loan, a cow and a calf would be tied in the backyard without providing grass, bay, oil cake and water. Realising that it is condemnable to leave the cow and calf witbout food, the debtor would remove even the “Tali' from the neck of his wife and se!l it to repay the loan. It is only after settling the dues, he would walk in the streets with a raised head. My father told me about all these. If one should do like that in these modern days, the educated lawyer would counsel his client to milch the cow and get the milk to him. He would boldly say that he would face the disgrace. In this sort of way, the lawyer would make his client bold enough to do anytbing good or bad That is the reason why we now find so many magis. trates, munisff courts, session courts, high courts. Were all these found in the olden days, when people were uueducated Is not our modern education system that is responsible for the degradation amongst our people ? Is not our education

responsible for the increasing dishonesty? What is wrong if I say that our modern educational system has ruined the nation and the people.

Let us see what our technical education does for the society. In the name of Technical education money is wasted and there is intellectual bankruptcy. The trades taught to the students in the schools nowadays are absolutely unwanted and unsuited.

On account of the national agitation for freedom, many trades are now being taught to children like carpentry, agriculture and spinning. Unnecessarily money is spent. Time is wasted. What are we going to gain by making the sons of a lawyer,judge, mirasdar merchant and landlord sit together for a few hours to leara a trade or spin yarn. If you say that one must learn all trades, I would like to refute the statement. How could it be possible to master the trades in the world by learning these one or two trades?

If you say that technical training is useful to make out a living, I would like to ask you whether the sons of various categories I mentioned above are going to make a living by these trades. Is it ever possibles So it is for you to think over, whether this technical education is in any way helpful to gain kpowledge or to make out a decent living. Look at the education given in High Schools. There subjects like Science and History are taught to waste time and money. Youngsters are tutored to memorise important portions. After that they pass the examinations and seek a job somewhere on a meagre salary of Rs. 30/-.

There, what all one learnt is not useful. He cannot do anything out of his own knowledge. He is a mere subordinate to his boss. If he wants to please his master he has no other go than to submerge his conscience and dignity. Then only he can be in the good books of his superiors. In many cases this is the only way to get increment. - Thus we see that all that he learnt by education is of no avail to him in his later life. He has got to lead his life with the

earnings and die at last. His knowledge and wisdom is not worth a tuppence His education has no bearing on his profession in life.

Similarly the technical knowledge gained is of no use in life and for the purpose of earning in his later life. If we are really sincere to teach some sort of technical education to the children, we have to understand the aptitude and inclination of the children and then rationally classify them into several categories and then impart to them the trade they like. Then only we can make the technical training useful to them in the future.

Our women could be trained to spin yarns. That will be useful to them in certain respects. More than this it is quite necessary to propagate the importance of supporting Khadder to all the males. We mus enlighten them to wear khadder. Instead of doin this, what is the use of spending public money to purchase Rattai' and 'Thakli' and make the children waste their time and cotton. Don't we see the spun yarn thrown into dust bins ? We don't find the government officials and their children wear 'khadder'? We don't find the Taluq staff and District Board staff encouraging 'Khadder'? What is the use of a boy learning to spin without wearing Khadder or unders. tanding the importance of Khadder? Is it not a mockery to see teachers, not wearing Khadder and yet appeal to others to wear Khadder

While education and trade are in this deplorable conditions, how could you expect the teachers and students to be responsible, dutiful and patriotic. It is no wonder that their condition is much more worse. I would say that the relationship between a prostitute and her mate is by far better than that of the relationship between a teacher and a student. Why do I say so? A prostitute may have one cam panion for the whole night. But, for one hour our students have two teachers. There is no scope to study under one responsible teacher permanently. There are no chances to learn vital matters in a responsible way. The teachers

are at full liberty to go to any school seeking a better salary Similarly the students have the right to change the schools to suit their convenience. They are at perfect liberty to take any decision as they please. It is for the individual to read or not! It is for the teacher to promote the student or not. There seems to be no control over both. In this irresponsibie way both the teachers and students are seen to carry on things.

I have traced the distressed conditions about our education, koowledge, • vocational training, sense of obedience to teachers. now I like to say a few words about the living conditions of our teachers. I would say that they are apsolutely struggling in life for existence. Their lot is very much pitiable.

In the olden days, the teachers had no worry about their life. It was enough if they simply had a small hut. A small 'pandal' in front of the hut was enough for the students to learn. It was. enough if there were a few palm leaves and a cartful of sand to learn. Any pointed, thin slick was enough for writing. Teachers had no worry about anything else. If the teacher puts a word to the boys during the harvest season, many baskets full of food grains would come to his doors. It would become very difficult for him to find adequate space to store up the grains. So, he will have to say 'enough' to the boys. Firewood will be sup plied for a month. Vegetables would be gifted to him daily During festival days, he would get the new clothes needed for his entire family. To meet his other expenses the parents would whole-heartedly give lump sums, out of gratitudo. If anything good or bad takes place in his family, the parents and bove would extend help voluntarily and make the functions a grand success. The teachers took up the responsi. bility to educate the boys entrusted to their care. The parents shouldered the responsibility to look after the teachers welfare

If the children misbehaved at home or failed to answer any question in the lessons covered, the teacher would be informed and it might lead to the reduction of help extended to the teacher by the parent. Boys were terribly afraid of their teachers. They had so much reverence. No teacher was made to suffer for want of food. It is only the womenfolk in the family of the teacher who had to worry about the difficulties in the family. No family problem tortured the teacher as they were not at all informed of the family troubles. The expenses for educating children in thuse days was meagre, say one sixteenth of what we now spend for education. Nowadays there seems to be no end for spending money to educate children..

Enormous amounts are needed for books, papers, pens, pencils, colouring boxes, charts, games, benches, chairs, tables, buildings and so on. It is becoming unbearable. Above all these things, the enoluments to teachers make it a tough task to seek adequate resources.

Generally speaking the pay given to a primary teacher is much lesser than the salary paid to a police man or an office peon. Unless one is paid at least 30 rupees it will not be possible to maintain the family in these days (1927). I find the teacher not being paid even this amount. They are suffering and under." going difficulties. We cannot but sympathise with their lot.

Because of the present educational system, many of the families which could do work in many ways without getting any education are being ruined. The more and more we afford this sort of higher education, the families in which youngsters are educated are going from bad to worse.

For example. look at the Land-Holders Register. See the people who held the lands 40, 50 years back. Find out whether all of them continue to hold the lands 10 years later. You will find 75 percent of the names changed. You will find them to have sold away ibeir lands. Not only that, if those who held lands then were Gounders, Naickens,' Pillais, Pada yachis, and

Naidus, you will find their lands now in the names of Iyers, Iyengars, Acharis, Chettiars and so on. The lands would be now possessed by law yers, officials, and businessmen. What is the reason for this ? As the number of High Schools increase almost all children are admitted for getting higher education. Even the children of the ordinary tiller of the soil who owas a small piece of land admits his children for getting education. These children have no necessity to get educated under the present educa tional system to seek a job for their future life.

Moreover the teachers are envious of these children opting to learr. higher education, as that would ruin the prospects of their own children. They are not being tutored properly. They simply waste money for five or six years. All that they are able to do is to get their heads cropped. They learn to smoke. They wear fantastic dress and lead an irresponsible charac terless life. They simply pay for the seats they occupy in the classes. They learn to speak indecent language. They get detained in the class two oi three times, wasting money and time. Ultimately they feel that they are no more suited to get education and go back to their homes. There is another drawback also in this. Having been accustomed to the luxurious happy life in the modern cities, they are reluctant to settle in the villages. They have a version to their house and cultiva ble lands. Their aim is diverted towards town life. They build new houses with all the comforts in the towns. On account of this a griculture is affected badly. The usual income from the regular cultivation deteriorates. But on the expense side, there is a steep rise Financial problems crop up and they become debtors. They are faced with unnecessary troubles. They are forced to offer bribes to officials The lawyers thrive out of the fees they receive Money lenders squeeze out their money by way of interest. Ultimately it results in parting away with their fertile lands. Pattas change. Their lands pass on to others. If the present situation continues for anotber 50 years all our lands

will be soatched away from the poor land holder by the officers and lawyers and money lenders The children of the present day mirasdars may become lease holders of the land. They may even have to work in the lands as ordinary workers on wage basis.

The government spends crores of rupees for education If the teachers get their due share there will be no need to grumble. But see what is happen ing Major portion of the sums allotted for education is being liberally spent for purchasing articles, for constructing buildings, for the highly paid officials. Money is wasted for unnecessary things and the paimary teachers are being treated as more cattle. They are left in the lurch without food.

Elected representatives of the people in the Assembly and other politicians pretend to sympa. thise with your cause and create a mere temptation, by assuring you that they would secure 40 or 50 rupees a month. You become satisfied and hope for a good future. But what happens? They simply make use of you to catch votes. The same people when they bappen to meet the people they say “The govern ment is collecting more taxes. The expenses of the government has enormously increased because of the bureaucratic set up. Too many unnecessary high posts in tho government have led to the necesrity to seck more resources. So vote for us, and wo will reduce the expenses of the government and reduce the taxes". It is all a mere vole catching device. They mako all sorts of promises on the platform. These olected representatives of the people are adepts in cheating the public as well as the primary teachers. They simply put one or two questions in the Assembly devoted to your cause. In order to betray the general publlc and primary teachers they shed crocodile tears on one side and act as spies to the government. They are after name and fame. Their interest is to better themselves. . They hunt for high positions in a selfish manner. They are keen on getting things done for their own interest. As a matter of fact the problem of reducing taxes and increasing the salaries are absolutely contradictory. If they are really sincere to enhance

your scales of pay and reduce taxes they must first gain boldness to plead for the curtailment of all the unnecessary expenses. How do you expect them to plead in such a maoner? They are themselves receiving Rs. 1000, 2000, 3000, 4000, 5000 as their monthly salary. They are aspiring to become ministers and leaders. Not only this much. They are for enriching their own financial resources by trying to help the job-hunters and appointment-seekers. They are quite keen to recommend applicants for self-interest. Apart from all these they are themselves demanding increase in sitting allowances as Rs. 10, 15, 40, 50 daily. They are clamouring for freo travel in first class; and for Increase in travelling allowances. In the Budget they manage to allocate Rs. 2, 3, lakhs. Sometimes 2, 4 crores of rupees for their meetings and other purposes. In short they are for leading a royal life. So long as there is place for this sort of fradulent actions, and so long as you people support such men and honour them I tell you there will be no salvation either for you all or for the general public. This is my personal opinion. I request you to avoid this vicious circle. Do not become victims to these political elements or fall a prey to their conspiracies If I am further to analyse other things you will feel very much. So I refrain. You have passed a number of resolutions in E this conference I very much sympathise with the sentiments expressed in most of the resolutions. I am aware of your genuine grievances and difficulties.

I entirely agree that your status should be raised. You deserve more. Your salary must be enhanced. I assure you that I will do my best to support your cause and justify your agitation demanding. the implementation of the resolutions. Do not be selfish to agitate for mere personal gains. You should all aim at becoming ideal primary teachers of the people. In the task of reforming the educational system of our country, the part to be played by you all is very great. Similarly the Talug, District Board and Municipal authorities too shoulder the responsiblity to seek a good change. You will yourself realise all these, if you view matters

with a patriotic out-look. I appeal to the officials and members of the Taluq Boards and District Boards, who are assembled here to take a favourable decision regarding your demands..

I have spoken very frankly what all I felt. Il think there may be things which are to be welcomed and not to be welcomed. So I appeal to you to make use of your rational thinking faculties. Take wbatever is good and leave wbatever is unpalatablc. Try to put into practice if there is anythiog you Welcome With these words, I resume my seat, thanking you all for the opportunity given to me to preside conference.